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Defense Health Agency to Assume Oversight of DoD HIV/AIDS Prevention Program

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Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, director, Defense Health Agency (DHA), visits the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC) June 8, to discuss the transition of oversight for the Department of Defense (DoD) HIV/AIDS Prevention Program's (DHAPP) from Navy Medicine to the DHA. DHAPP was created as a medical executive agent (EA) in 2001 to fight the HIV pandemic and support global health security. Since that time, DHAPP has been a directorate under NHRC, which has provided oversight and administrative support. In 2014, on year after the DHA was stood, the DoD approved realignment of all medical EA organizations under DHA leadership.

SAN DIEGO – Vice Adm. Raquel Bono, director, Defense Health Agency (DHA), visited the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC) June 8, to discuss the transition of oversight for the Department of Defense (DoD) HIV/AIDS Prevention Program's (DHAPP) from Navy Medicine to the DHA.

DHAPP was established in 2001 to help contain the global health threat posed by the HIV pandemic. DHAPP's mission was (and still is) to assist foreign militaries develop HIV control programs in support of global health security and DoD security cooperation efforts.

Since DHAPP's founding, the Navy, through Navy Medicine and NHRC, has served as executive agent (EA) for the organization. NHRC was selected to manage DHAPP, which is a directorate of

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the research center, due to the command's expertise in HIV research and development of effective prevention and intervention programs for the U.S. military.

In 2014, one year after the DHA was stood up, the DoD approved the realignment of all medical EA organizations under DHA's leadership. DHA oversight will streamline interagency collaboration for DHAPP and enhance the DHA's global health engagement capabilities and mission.

Bono's visit provided the opportunity for her to learn more about DHAPP operations, the level of administrative support NHRC provides for the directorate, and meet with staff before the transition is complete in late August. This was Bono's second visit to NHRC and DHAPP. While serving as the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) surgeon, Bono toured the command during a West Coast visit.

"When I was the PACOM surgeon, a large part of my portfolio included going into different countries to support global health engagement and look at theater security cooperation," said Bono. "DHAPP, along with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and other government agencies, was among our constant partners. I was always very impressed when these organizations came together in interagency collaboration, sharing collective goals and making progress towards achieving them."

Bono went on to say that having DHAPP align under DHA's leadership will enable broader opportunities for the organization to expand its interagency partnerships and work more closely with the DoD's combatant commands (COCOMS). DHA is a joint, integrated combat support agency that enables the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services to provide the COCOMS with a medically ready force and a ready medical force.

"As a combat support agency, with direct linkages to the COCOMS, DHA can amplify the work DHAPP is doing towards global health engagement," said Bono. "I'm also interested in how DHAPP can synergize with the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch and the Global Emerging Infections Surveillance section to create a collective impact that broadens our effectiveness in advancing global public health."

Rick Shaffer, DHAPP director, said he and his team are looking forward to opportunities the transition will bring.

"Change can be unsettling, but this transition moves DHAPP in a positive direction," said Shaffer. "We've grown a great deal since 2001, and joining forces with DHA will allow us to reach a far greater potential as a DoD program, particularly as we look to increase our medical stability operations and continue our work helping partner militaries become self-sufficient with their own HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs."

During a meet and greet with DHAPP staff, Bono told them she's looking forward to working with them as they leverage their expertise for the benefit of all the services.

"We are on the precipice of making tremendous change and I see DHAPP's transition as a very unique opportunity," said Bono. "In the DHA, we are leaning very far forward, constantly challenging conventional thinking and behavior, to achieve our full potential. If you aren't uncomfortable, you aren't leaning far enough forward. But no matter how far forward you're leaning, I will not let anyone down, because I've got you by the belt strap. So, lean forward. Get a little uncomfortable. Prepare to make new things happen."

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